

# Folks in Anthem hear I-17 plans

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Anthem residents gathered Friday morning to talk about their only link with the outside world.

The far north Valley community, which has grown to more than 9,000 homes, is dependent on congested Interstate 17 for traveling to Phoenix and other parts of the Valley.

With construction set to begin in late spring to widen and improve the freeway from Loop 101 to Carefree Highway, the Anthem folk are anxiously waiting their turn for added lanes between Carefree Highway and Anthem Way.

During the meeting, they expressed the added concern that the upcoming freeway construction would create worse traffic jams before completion.

"It's difficult for people here to get downtown," said state Sen. Pamela Gorman, who represents the area and conducted Friday's meeting, which included officials from the Arizona Department of Transportation.

ADOT spokesman Tim Tate told the 25 people at the session that the highway-building agency was mandated by federal regulations to maintain two lanes of travel in each direction on the busy interstate during construction. In some locations, that will require temporary lanes to be built around the roadwork.

"We have to maintain I-17 as a major roadway even as we construct it," Tate said. "Closing I-17 would be very difficult."

In December, Anthem received the good news that the widening of I-17 in their area would be accelerated to start in 2009 from its original scheduled start date in 2023. The acceleration was made possible with \$193 million approved by the state Legislature to move up a number of freeway projects in Maricopa County.